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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a brief critique of the current failures of schooling to produce healthy psychological growth as well as a rationale for needed new forms for education. A new curriculum for secondary schools is presented, the result of a three year project in public schools. Employing a combination of practicum and seminar experiences in series of classes in psychology as the basic pedagogy, high school students were shown to develop both the requisite skills as well as experience personal growth. Classes in peer-counseling, cross-age teaching, and nursery school work formed the practicum. The resulting curriculum gives promise of promoting psychological growth for secondary school students. Both statistical and clinical evidence indicated significant psychological development on the part of the teenage psychological practitioners. References are included. (Author)

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# A Curriculum for Psychological Development: Learning Psychology by Doing Psychology

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Summary

This paper presents a brief critique of the current failures of schooling to produce healthy psychological growth as well as a rationale for needed new forms for education. Then a new curriculum for secondary schools is presented, the result of a three year project in public schools. Employing a combination of practicum and seminar experiences in series of classes in psychology as the basic pedagogy, high students were shown to develop both the requisite skills as well experience personal growth. Classes in peer-counseling, cross-age teaching, and nursery school work formed the practicum. The resulting curriculum gives promise of promoting positive psychological growth for secondary school students. Both statistical and clinical evidence indicated significant psychological development on the part of the teenage psychological practitioners.

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Schooling and Negative Personal Education

There has been a recent growing concern over the apparent failures of schooling. An array of books, articles and studies from a wide range of perspectives have documented the general ineffectiveness of most school programs to educate pupils in positive or meaningful directions. From large scale studies, e. g., Coleman[2], Minuchin[10], Silberman[14], to clinical, eyewitness accounts, e.g., Jackson[3], Kozol[6], Kohl[5], the same negative findings re-appear. The failures appear multiple. The school as a "melting pot" to forge a common heritage for general citizenship has been shown as a convenient myth, Schrag[13], or worse yet as a shabby rationalization for the existing inequality of educational opportunity, Sprinthall and Mosher[15]. The "mindless" school of Silberman's searching examination finds concordance with the "soul-less" school of Herbert Kohl's first-person account.

The current critique of schooling, however, goes beyond, simply general and multiple failures. The problem is more complex than the realization of few, if any, positive outcomes from time spent in school. The studies mentioned, and others as well, indicate that too often the pupils are being affected by schooling, but the effect is negative. For years, indeed centuries, educators have argued and questioned the place for personal learning in the school curriculum. Generally it had been assumed that healthy self concepts, positive psychological growth, and pro-active egos would result as a by-product of carefully monitored academic learning, usually in the five "sacred" disciplines. The recent studies have shown that indeed schools are engaged in psychological education and are teaching for personal learning, but the resulting psychological learning is negative. Intrinsic interest in learning declines the longer the pupil remains in school. Negative self-concepts increase with time in urban ghetto schools. Personal efficacy declines. Prejudiced thinking increases. The litany mounts, detailing educationally noxious results[15].

By teaching a child that he is an unworthy person, or that the main value for education is monetary, or that learning is essentially a process of sitting and listening passively, the school, defacto, has a curriculum for psychological

education. The increasing unrest and upset in schools is a poignant reminder that we are no longer dealing with schooling as a placebo. The increase in drug use, drop-outs, runaways, and ironically the increased number of policemen in schools, together form a crude and horrifying barometer.

Primary Prevention and Partial Solutions

The extent, pervasiveness, and complexity of the educational problems essentially has defeated a series of attempted solutions. Two major thrusts in the last decade were designed to alleviate the crippling effects of schooling. The first and by far the most significant numerically was the influx of guidance counselors, especially at the secondary school level. The second was the modernization of the school psycholgist's role and function. The combination of "journeymen" practicing counselors, backed up by "expert" school psychologists was optimistically viewed as the intervention system. However, as we now can see so clearly, the school counselors themselves remained essentially as ancillary. Their work and their programs rarely touched the basic learning experiences of most children. The special programs for counseling underachievers, low aspirers, behavior problems, motivational concerns, et. al.: all such programs basically attempted to change the child, but never the system. The logic was simple. It was easier to change the child than the system, as McClelland[9] once noted. At least it seemed easier. The result, however, was that guidance as a "near" profession was no closer to its objective than it was ten or fifteen years ago. Busily adjusting children to school, counselors had no time to question, let alone change, the institution. An early theoretical giant in guidance warned the profession in the late 40's. Mathewson noted:

> The belief that guidance, through personalized concern and attention can adequately substitute for the deficiencies of a narrowly academic program is a snare and a delusion . . . . If the broadly instructional phases of the curriculum cannot develop the student, no intermittent process no matter how individualized and specialized, can do so.[8]

The warning was ignored. Our pre-occupation with training technicians and ancillary administrative personnel in counseling closed our ears and clouded our vision. Ironically, the programs to change the children failed too.

So too for school psychology. The creation of special psychological services never directly reached into the institution of schooling. Diagnosis for referral, crisis consultation, short term therapy "boot legged" through the back door, teacher and parent workshops: all such programs never resloved the dilemma so beautifully captured in Mary Alice's, "White Clinic in the Little Red School."[16]

The hopes to develop effective programs for primary prevention of mental illness were dashed by the fundamental separation of the therapeutic and the educational. If the institution of the school through its curriculum is the iatrogenic agent then any primary prevention program must seek to fundamentally re-order the quality of the learning experiences within the curriculum. It was toward that objective that our program was developed.

A Curriculum Beginning

With the objective of re-ordering curriculum goals toward primary prevention, a project staff was recruited under the sponsorship of the TTT program and housed at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Along with my colleague of many years, Professor Mosher, and a small core of genuinely innovative graduate students, we moved from the comfort of the library and our seminar rooms to the classroom. Employing a unique curriculum development model, the idea of Mosher[11], we operated with a series of field trials - an action-reflection cycle as it became known. Each cycle, on a semester sequence, involved planning, try-out, and formative evaluation, followed by another cycle. This procedure enabled us to try-out a large number of curriculum courses in a relatively short time period. It also prevented us from becoming prematurely fixated on any particular solution. Certainly a classic error in most curriculum projects is that the genuine field trials come too late.

Indeed we might better refer to the process as curriculum evolution rather than development. We taught high school classes in "Psychology" with average enrollments of 25 pupils. Under the subject matter of Psychology, there is still considerable lattitude as to content and approach. This provided the needed flexibility. We could remain within the regular school curriculum in social science yet not be bound by such considerations as a prescribed content or a College Board achievement test. Thus we could employ the necessary experimentation while defining the field of study simultaneously.

Two Failures

Our failures, at the outset, were almost as dramatic as the eventual successes. In the first instance, we tried teaching principles of psychology, namely child and adolescent development, through a team teaching approach and included multi-media resources. While an adequate means of covering material, the large lecture and small group discussion organized around psychological topics, failed as a means of reaching our broad objectives. It was too much like business usual for the pupils. Listening, watching, and reading promoted more passive and begrudging learning on the part of the pupils. There were some exceptions but those remained exceptions. By teaching a regular course without the usual sanctions (the grades were"pass"-"fail" and attendance was not required) we were able to assess the power of the approach itself. It soon became fairly obvious, regardless of the skilled performance of the lecturers, that this would not lead to a new and significant learning model.

At the other extreme, pedagogically, we tried a T-group approach. Rather than the content of psychology, the process of psychology became pre-eminent. A careful listening of each tape-recorded session indicated, however, that the insistent focus on process was not productive. The ambiguity, lack of structure, and absence of direct responsiveness by the leaders promoted excessive periods of silence, verging on collective mutism in places. Adolescence as a stage of development does not seem the time for the constant self examination of the T group,

at least for regular classroom pupils. A few pupils seemed capable of using the approach to advantage but for most it was just like the rest of school, a waste of time.

I should also mention that in addition to these two major failures we had a series of minor reserves. We tried out some so-called mini-courses, or brief units on psychological topics. For example, a case study from a standard such as White's "Lives in Progress", or regular clinical assessment of a child from a guidance clinic might be presented and discussed. This could be followed by a movie such as "Nobody Waved Good-bye" or "Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner". The attempt would be to help the pupils learn about themes of human development vicariously and then gradually focus the curriculum toward their own concerns. What we called the "vicarious to self" continuum never reached the self and there was some question whether it was even vicarious. Analyzing human themes in movies is about as exciting today as going over a poem line by line was yesterday. Implicitly, the pupils felt there were certain right answers that they were expected to produce for our benefit. The thinking tended toward the mechanical as a result.

Thus we found ourselves standing in the midst of another series of interesting but partial solutions. Our programs would be just as ancillary, just as ineffectual, just as piece-meal as those of the previous contenders. However, amid the failures we also found some contrary evidence.

A Pedagogy for Personal Growth

One particularly promising system of teaching and learning that evolved from our efforts was a combined approach employing a practicum experience and seminar for the careful examination of that experience. We developed a series of separate courses for trial, and I shall describe three such courses: (1) counseling psychology, (2) educational psychology, and (3) child development. Each class had its own practicum, e.g., counseling peers, cross-age teaching (high school pupils teaching in elementary schools), and working in a nursery school. Each class also had its own seminar component in which both the teenager's experience in the task

as well as more or less traditional academic information was discussed. In this way we had a series of structures for learning. Process and content were not artificially separated. Far more important, however, was the motivation provided by the task of effective functioning under real conditions. Learning psychology by doing psychology is hardly a revolutionary idea. The experience, however, is not enough. It was clear to us that the quality of supervision, the management of the examination of teenage "self" in the situations, was the key. The requisite iron discipline of learning to listen and respond in a counseling seminar and practicum, the need to learn teaching techniques as well as some principles of elementary age development in an educational psychology seminar and practicum, and the same kinds of requirements at the nursery school setting: these were the elements that made for effective learning programs. The need to "do" creates a need to think not only about self but about ideas and materials, in this case from the storehouses of psychology.

Indicators of Outcome

At the outset of the project we had decided it was essential to assess our program at two levels. One assessment was at the level of skills, information, and content, e.g., Does the peer counselor learn effective counseling techniques? Does the nursery work lead to comprehension of some basic principles of child development? In other words, at an operational level, did the students learn to "do" some psychology.

A second level of assessment was toward the psychological impact of the experience upon the teenage pupil. If we were serious about our rhetoric of new forms for education and a general revision of the narrowly cognitive school curriculum, we would, by necessity, have to emphasize the effect upon the adolescent. To measure such an effect as psychological growth and development is admittedly complex. While acknowledging the complexity, we did decide to employ a developmental approximation. Using two measures of ego development, the Kohlberg system of levels of moral maturity[4], and the Loevinger[7] system of general

levels of ego development, we assessed the pupils on a pre-posttest. In addition, we used a clinical system with the staff as participant observers as well as conducting a series of interviews with the pupils at the end of each course. Finally, obvious but unobtrusive indices were employed - e.g., class attendance, unsolicited comments, parent reactions. No single measurement procedure on its own could be defended as the measure of psychological growth. We felt, however, that if consistent themes emerged across our broad series of measures, we might have indicators of effectiveness.

The results from the counseling practicum and seminar (teaching teenagers to become peer counselors) showed that there were significant effects at both levels. The teenagers learned the basic communication skills commonly taught in graduate programs. Using the Carkhuff[1] system of pre-post scores on levels of measured "Empathy:, and "Immediacy", the teenagers showed statistically significant improvement (Empathy from $\bar{X}_1 = 2.51$ to $\bar{X}_2 = 3.23$, $p < .011$ and Immediacy from $\bar{X}_1 = 2.80$ to $\bar{X}_2 = 3.86$, $p < .03$). When we tried a similar program with black ghetto teenagers, we found that those teenagers also were rated at the "3" level on the Carkhuff scales. The difference between the white and the black teenagers was at the beginning. The blacks had lower scale scores at the outset but ended at equal or higher levels than the whites as a result of the program.*

The clinical assessment of counseling effectiveness which consisted of listening to their tape-recorded counseling sessions over the period of each term confirmed the rating scale scores. The greater comprehenseiveness of communication, the ability to hear both the content and the affect clearly improved over the training period. The comparison groups showed no change. Also, again at the skill level, we found the students in the counseling class gained an understanding of the

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*The specific detailed research procedures for both these counseling programs can be found in 11 as well as in two thesis dissertations, Dowell, R.C., "Adolescents as Peer Counselors: A Program for Psychological Education", Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1971, and Griffin, A., "Teaching Counselor Education to Black Teenagers," 1972, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

"traditional" issues in counselor education. Their comments on the "Gloria" film with Rogers, Perls, and Ellis as expert counselors indicated how much they understood of different "models" of intervention. Thus they could both do psychology and talk intelligently about the issues. That they generally achieved rated levels of effectiveness above those of experienced counselors and therapists should not be missed.*

What of the effect of this learning upon themselves? Recall that we could not be satisfied solely with a skill training outcome nor a program of narrow pre-vocational training. On the measures of psychological growth we found that a major change occurred on the Loevinger scales. As a general indicator of ego development in a sequence of stages, the teenagers in the counseling class moved from level 3 to level 4 ($\bar{X}_1 = 3.2$, $\bar{X}_2 = 4.4$, $p < .001$). The shift was from wary, self-protective to more trust and open communication and higher self respect and complexity. Essentially, this is a shift from other-directedness, as Riesman might say, to the beginnings of a more integrated inner-reliant and less ego-centric stage. The Kohlberg results, while not as dramatic, statistically confirmed the trend shift. The pupils moved from stage III toward stage IV ($\bar{X}_1 = 3.22$, $\bar{X}_2 = 3.56$, $p < .08$). The content of those stages is analogous to the Loevinger, except that is is much more difficult to move through an entire stage in the Kohlberg system. It usually takes teenagers two or three years to move from III to IV and even then a substantial minority never make it past level III. Thus the smaller quantitative shift in the Kohlberg results may well be more significant theoretically.

Again, and not insignificantly, the project staff of clinically oriented counselors and teachers felt without question that the statistical results confirmed

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*A direct spin-off of last year's course, was the creation of a student-run counseling center. Trained peer counselors are being professionally supervised on a systematic basis as part of their on-going counseling program in the Newton, Massachusetts system.

their own subjective impressions of growth and maturity. The levels of responsiveness, helping, caring, and responsibility in the classes themselves subjectively attested to behavior change at a psychological level. Certainly the students in their own "talk" and in post class interviews indicated that their experiences had been of positive growth and development. Class attendance remained high throughout.

In the cross-age teaching class in educational psychology similar results have appeared. Again the change is most obvious at the skill level. The teenagers can learn to be effective managers of the instructional process. They also can read and discuss with sensitivity and intelligence various teaching models (from Sylvia Ashton Warner to Vince Lombardi, we came to say) as well as learning theories from Skinner to Bruner to Rogers.* Also, they can view video tapes of teaching styles and come to understand the nuances between teaching and manipulation. At the second level, the effects upon their own psychological growth was similar to that from the counseling class. While cross-age teaching has already been shown to produce improvement in the achievement scores of the youthful tutors, we again were concerned with the broader objective.**

In the Child Development Class, now in its second try-out, we do not yet have the assessment data. In reading the weekly student journals, listening to the themes discussed in the seminar, and examining the video tapes of the teenagers work

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*One girl was so impress by Neill's "Summerhill" that she went home and kept her parents up until 4 A.M. discussing the implications. Although the parents did not appreciate the timing, they did respond since it was the first time in a year or two there was any talk at all.

**The results and a highly readable account of the cross-age teaching can be found in a thesis by Atkins, V., "High School Students Who Teach: An Approach to Personal Learning", Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1972.

over the first two months, we can say the same general effects seem to be occuring. Wary, self conscientious, ego-centric, stereotyped behavior declines significantly. It is interesting to note that teenagers, especially boys, at the outset have to be directly helped to move into the mainstream of the school. Fortunately, the three and four year olds seem to sense the initial "school" anxiety on the part of the teenagers. As a result, they lead their older and bigger "new friends" by the hand into the classroom activity.* Sometimes one cannot predict exactly where educational help may come from.

I should also mention that the program has not been limited to just these three components. A very promising component in improvisational dance and drama - the psychology of expressive behavior has also been tested out successfully. Because of time and space problems, however, I have not included a description of that component.**

Toward a Theory for Psychological Growth

Naturally the most important aspect of these findings are the general theoretical speculations that arise. How can we explain the apparently positive effects? Is it, cynically, that "something" is always better than nothing? Compared to the usual drab offerings, was our program simply flashy? Logically, an examination of the tasks and the time involved, as well as the often painful moments of personal examination that the pupils experienced led us to feel that this was more than just a teenage version of "Sesame Street." Personal learning involves a dis-equilibrium, indeed often forcing an acknowledgement of the hidden agenda of inner

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*The present comprehensive try-out is being directed by Barbara Meyer Greenspan and Robert Evans, both doctoral students at H.G.S.E. and members of our staff. Unfortunately, the writer had to leave the project prior to the completion of the final phase of testing that component.

**See Mager, G., Improvisational Drama as a Way to Learn about Oneself. Harvard Graduate School of Education Thesis, 1972.

thoughts and feelings. The personal growth in the class was not without these elements. Indeed as we came to say that personal learning and growth must by definition be personal, sometimes upsetting and neither safe nor innocuous. At the same time, having a dual focus in class was a helpful structure. We could move between learning to work with others, the outside task, and the personal concerns within the class. We could avoid a relentless examination of either as a singular process.

A second issue of major importance is relation between the teaching approach and adolescence as a stage of development. Given the current nature of our society, it is probably fair to say that the experience-table of most adolescents is narrow. The passive and vicarious school curriculum has joined hands with a society that generally has lengthened the time between the preparation and implementation of one's own career to the point where we will have to soon measure it in light years. To remedy that problem then, a program that deliberately expands the experience-table, increases the social roles, demands the ability to understand and experience problems from another's point of view, etc., may be the necessary means to nuture growth. Kohlberg's work on moral development has suggested that the amount of experience in a variety of social roles during appropriate stages will produce significant and positive change. It certainly makes theoretical sense to consider such a process central to growth and maturation. The students themselves felt that the experience under genuine conditions of responsibility was the key growth element.

Essentially, we concluded that to aim toward the objectives of psychological growth or the primary prevention of mental illness, school programs should become components of the regular school curriculum. To reform school to promote human growth to us means to change the curriculum. A new form for personal education seems to reside in the experienced-based approach we employed. Experience preceeding or concurrent with academic learning seems to reverse the usual trend to

passive and vicarious "spectator" learning. Combining action and reflection, we created learning under real conditions, with significant responsibility and under rigorous examination. It may be that we have merely re-discovered a new version of "Captain's Courageous" for adolescents, but that could be more than simply an accident.

One further speculation concerns the problem of emotional growth during adolescence. Although we have no comprehensive framework, we were intrigued with the teenagers abilities to respond to emotions. Although, like everyone else, they were terrible at the outset, in all of the programs, they learned to identify, respond, and clarify emotions with skill. If Schachter's [12] so-called jute-box theory is correct, a general human problem is the difficulty in identifying and indeed "labeling" feelings. The learning of a language to express and label emotions may represent a most significant educational and personal experience. Certainly we can hardly deal effectively with unkown emotions. Learning to acknowledge, identify, and above all, to respond accurately to those vague feelings may be the major achievement of any program that dares to claim significant psychological growth as outcome.

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